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ABSTRACT

This paper sketches major programs for adult education in Sweden, the Soviet Union, France, and England and considers several policy implications for adult education in the United States. The first section examines the reforms in Swedish public education designed to facilitate social equality, with special emphasis on the study circle. A description of the institutions and practices of the Soviet adult education system is provided in the second section. The third section concentrates on the various types of local educational agencies and systems for industrial training found in England. Discussed in the fourth section are aspects of France's adult education program, such as guaranteed paid educational leave, continuing adult education, training courses, formal and popular learning activities, and special programs for older adults. The final section examines policy implications for adult education in the United States for employee training systems, learning services for poorly educated and illiterate adults, institutes to serve the older adult, televised courses, diversification of services to accomodate the diversity of adult learning interests, and a system for unified lifelong learning. (MN)

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LEARNING FROM ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Looking at public policies in other countries can provide a useful perspective for considering related policies and practices in this country. For our purposes here, knowing something about adult education in other industrialized nations can bring a much needed perspective to our understanding of adult education in the United States. Much in the realm of adult education and training is more advanced in one or more foreign countries, while other aspects of the broad domain of adult education are relatively well-developed in America. For example, the U.S. seems to lag behind in providing training opportunities for workers and potential workers, and in providing educational services for adults who are illiterate or marginally literate. On the other hand, the U.S. has gone relatively far, for example, in developing instructional materials for parent education.

These general observations come from a year-long comparative study of adult education opportunities in nine industrialized countries conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).** The project was in response to an earlier Congressional mandate to review educational developments in foreign countries that may be appropriate for the U.S. The nine countries included in the study were Australia, Canada, Denmark, the

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Federal Republic of Germany, France, the Soviet Union, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In addition to reviewing broad national adult education policies and programs in each of the countries, the study gave particular attention to policies and programs directed toward four population subgroups: workers, older persons, women entering the labor force, and parents.

To gain a sense of the range of strategies that exists in other developed countries, this paper sketches major programs for adult education in four nations--Sweden, the Soviet Union, France, and England. At the end, several policy implications for the United States are briefly considered.

Sweden

The overriding objective of all public policies in Sweden is achievement of equality, not only of opportunities, but of actual living conditions, including economic, political, social and cultural resources. The extensive reforms in public education in Sweden (starting with the creation of comprehensive primary/secondary education in the early 1960s) have all been directed towards this objective.

During this reform period, government involvement in adult education expanded significantly. Before this, adult education, which has flourished since the establishment of the first "folk high schools" in the mid-19th century, had been almost exclusively the domain of Sweden's many popular movements (i.e., labor union, temperance, religious, political and cultural organizations). At present, government outlays for adult education

comprise roughly 10 percent of all expenditures in education. These outlays are in the form of government subsidies to programs, study grants to individuals, outreach activities, and research and development.

The most pervasive and innovative of all of Sweden's subsidized adult educational institutions is the study circle. A study circle is defined as an informal group which meets for the common pursuit of well planned studies of a subject or problem area which has previously been decided upon. The group itself determines how its work is to be planned and carried out. A circle leader has certain coordinating and administrative tasks, but does not act as a teacher in the ordinary sense. There are no formal requirements for circle leaders.

Study circles are sponsored by the various voluntary organizations. However, as long as they meet certain requirements regarding size of membership, duration and frequency of meetings, the circles can receive subsidies of 75 to 90 percent from national and local government funds. Those that teach priority topics, such as Swedish to immigrants, can receive subsidies of up to 100 percent.

The most popular topics in the study circles are languages, esthetic subjects (art, music, handicrafts), and civics. In recent years many civics study circles have assumed an activist stance. For example, some circles have linked into energy issues in preparation for the 1980 referendum on nuclear power; others, in villages threatened by loss of job alternatives, have investigated alternative production schemes.

In the early 1970s, the government was alarmed by the discovery that its subsidies of adult education were actually operating to widen the gap

between the educationally advantaged and disadvantaged. Reaffirming the objective of equalization of resources, the government initiated a number of incentive programs designed to promote the further education of the "undereducated." Experiments in outreach--including house-to-house canvassing and work place recruitment--were initiated, more and larger study grants were made available to the disadvantaged, and a national law was passed guaranteeing unconditional educational leaves of absence. It is too early to assess the overall impact of such compensatory mechanisms, but some indicators are showing positive results.

Recent initiatives in adult education have not all come from the educational establishment. The National Labor Market Board invests as many resources as the Board of Education in adult education through its extensive involvement in labor market training. Briefly, the system of labor market training originated in the need to act swiftly against imbalances in the labor market, by helping the unemployed and those threatened by unemployment to improve their employability in occupations with better opportunities, and by increasing the supply of so-called "bottleneck skills." The Board's organizational strategy of reaching "rapid action" decisions through the collaborative efforts of local school authorities, labor unions and employers is perhaps unique in the industrialized world.

Sweden is dedicated to using its adult educational programs to further its goal of social equality. Swedish educators still feel that many reforms are needed before this becomes a reality. Such reforms are currently underway. It is likely that in the not-too-distant future adult education as we presently know it in Sweden will be incorporated into an authentic system of lifelong learning and will thus lose its distinctiveness.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union, in its educational system as in its other institutions, is characterized by extreme centralization. There is essentially a single system of education for children and adults. Local educational authorities are administrative agencies of the national government.

Some 11 percent of all enrollments in elementary and secondary schools are adults attending part time, either in correspondence ("extramural") courses or in evening (shift) schools. Pursuant to a 1973 regulation requiring all workers under age 30 to complete ten years of school, adults are expected to enter the course at the grade following the last grade completed earlier.

Nearly all Soviet higher education institutions have either evening or extramural departments, or both. Part-time higher education (evening or extramural) is available for some 250 of the 365 occupational specializations in Soviet higher education. Courses and texts are standardized across all the institutions. In all cities and at many large enterprises and construction sites, there are "consultation points" where extramural students can meet with faculty. In general, there are close connections between study and work; preference in admission is given when study plans are closely related to present job, and when the applicant is recommended by his employing organization.

Whether recommended or not, every worker has the right to take study leave, increasing from 20 to 40 days a year, while remaining on full pay. In the final year of study, students are entitled to four months' leave,

to carry out the "diploma project" required of all students and to prepare for final examinations. The diploma project is often a task that is part of the student's job duties. There is no age limit for entrance into part-time postsecondary education.

Every position in the Soviet non-agricultural labor force is designated by a job classification and a skill level, and formal training is required in order for a worker to advance in either respect. On the order of one-fourth of the labor force reportedly engages in some form of job-related training every year. Shorter training courses are usually conducted at work places; longer ones are held at educational institutions. Generally there are no costs to the trainees.

At managerial and professional levels, refresher courses are required of each person every five to six years. These courses are offered by special departments at more than 100 higher education institutions, and at nine special institutes. Typical full-time refresher courses last one to two months; part-time courses run for three to six months. Employing organizations pay normal salaries and reimburse travel and housing expenses.

The "People's Universities" are the only type of institution for adults in the Soviet Union that has no admissions requirements. They are also the only institution that regularly charges tuition fees, though these tend to be low. Most of the 40,000 or so Peoples' Universities specialize in one or another branch of knowledge; for example, about one-fourth are "pedagogical" universities, and about one-tenth specialize in health subjects. The term "university" is honorific; People's Universities do not award diplomas or occupational credentials. Yet many offer highly specific

occupational training, and some are closely linked to industrial enterprises for the purpose of employee upgrading.

While a People's University can be founded by almost any organization--industrial, agricultural, artistic, educational, governmental, for example--all of them apparently operate under the general aegis of Znanie, the Knowledge Society. Founded in 1947, Znanie's purpose is to disseminate information to the general population. It reportedly has 2,000,000 members who pay dues to support the organization's programs and who offer their administrative and teaching services free of charge. Znanie also conducts conferences and "theme evenings," presents radio and television lectures, and publishes books and periodicals.

Reportedly there is also a Central People's Teleuniversity, founded in 1969. Finally, there are thousands of "club organizations"--palaces and houses of culture, reading rooms, collective farm clubs, and so forth--that cater for the most part to avocational interests.

England

Adult education in the United Kingdom has been described, not necessarily derogatively, as a "patchwork." Unquestionably it is pluralistic; in part because of its long history, a great many organizations now play active roles. In contrast to the U.S.S.R., for example, it is highly decentralized: the great bulk of adult education is arranged by the Local Education Authorities (LEAs).

The duty to provide educational programs for adults is universally accepted by the 104 LEAs. However, local spending for adult education is discretionary, rather than mandatory or categorical. The nature and extent of LEA-sponsored programs thus depend heavily on the attitudes and judgments of local officials, and offerings accordingly vary greatly from one locality to another.

There is no common organizational pattern for LEA provision of adult education. Three main types are frequently identified:

(1) The area adult centre or institute. This could be a "wing" of a local school, usually a secondary school, devoted to adult education. Or the Centre could have its own premises. Frequently there are satellites throughout the area--in churches, village halls, and the like.

(2) The community school, community college, or village college. The basic concept is that one comprehensive institution is designed to meet the educational needs of everyone in a given area, regardless of age.

(3) The Adult Studies Department of a College of Further Education. All LEAs have Colleges of FE--in their juristictions; they mainly enroll youths aged 16 to 19. A relatively recent development is for these institutions to offer courses for older students.

Britain's universities have long had extramural departments or departments of adult education. They can receive from the national Department of Education and Science (DES) 75 percent of the costs for "liberal adult education" courses; other courses--professional upgrading, for example--must be financed in other ways.

The thirty Polytechnics, established in 1966, are evolving into important institutions for continuing education in England and Wales. Roughly one-third of their students attend part-time. Controlled by the LEAs, the Polytechnics are notably comprehensive: offerings include degree, postgraduate, and subdegree options; full-time, part-time (day or evening), and "sandwich" (alternating work and study) schemes; and short courses for professional updating.

The Open University must be counted one of the most important and successful of modern educational innovations. Designed expressly for older working adults, courses are "taught" through specially prepared texts coordinated with television and radio broadcasts produced by the BBC. Students can review lessons at any of the 260 study centres throughout the United Kingdom. The recently established Associate Student Programme currently offers 80 nondegree, mostly occupationally-related courses, each lasting ten months.

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA), founded in 1903, is concerned with the totality of education, but especially with education for adults and workers. In a participatory manner, WEA branches organize classes on student-selected topics and arrange lectures, day-long or week-end schools, conferences, and exhibitions. WEA units are eligible for funds from the DES and the LEAs.

Two systems for industrial training, both sponsored by the government's Manpower Services Commission (MSC), are significant:

(1) TOPS (Training Opportunities Scheme) provides grants to individuals over age 19, who are either unemployed or who wish to change jobs, to

train for up to one year at special skillcentres or at any college offering the needed curriculum.

(2) The 23 Industrial Training Boards (Agricultural, Petroleum, etc.) serve as conduits from the MSC for funds and training information to industries for in-house training of employees. ITB-supported training accounts for slightly less than half of all employer-based training.

Though now over, the British adult literacy campaign, conducted between 1975 and 1978, was a notable and, by most reports, quite successful instance of a multi-organizational, multi-media adult education undertaking in an industrialized country. Key participants included (in approximate chronological order) the British Association of Settlements, the BBC, the DES (and its three annual one million-pound grants), the National Institute of Adult Education (the coordinating unit for the campaign), the LEAs (which arranged for one-on-one tutoring), some 80,000 volunteer tutors, and close to 125,000 self-referred students.

France

The major French policy on adult education is based on the concept of paid educational leave as an individual right. This concept is couched within a philosophical commitment to lifelong learning and is supported by a massive and cumbersome statutory framework. The Law of 16 July 1971 "Concerning the Organization of Continuous Vocational Training Within the Framework of Lifelong Education" is the definitive piece of legislation.

"Formation continue," or continuing adult education, thereby becomes a national obligation. It applies to all who now are working (engaged in "la vie active") or who wish to be. The legislative intent is to provide mechanisms, equity, encouragement and financial assistance for adults to continue their education during working hours without loss of social benefits, employment position, or wages. Individuals may seek further training for many reasons, among them, to adapt to changes in technology or work conditions, to advance to different social or cultural levels, and to provide access to better job opportunities. Training is financed by both the State and compulsory employer contributions.

A free market in training courses, which was created in 1971, is based on a consumer demand-multiple supply model implemented through contractual agreements. It establishes the rights and means for a broad range of groups to provide adult education. Providers may include: existing educational institutions at all levels; publicly funded agencies; private profit and non-profit establishments; firms and enterprises; trade unions, chambers of commerce, industry, trade, or agriculture; popular or socio-cultural movements; federal, local or regional authorities and their agents; and that long-standing French unit of social organization, the "association". (Any group of seven or more persons has the right to form and register as an "association" in accordance with a 1901 Law.)

Since 1971, administrative groups of secondary level establishments (GRETA's--Groupements d'Establissements du Second Degre) have been formed to manage further training. Each of the more than 370 GRETAs typically includes 10 establishments (comprehensive schools, grammar schools, tech-

nical grammar schools, etc.) located in a common geographical area, and offers a range of courses taught by staff employed in existing participating institutions.

Among the various types of higher education institutions in France, the relatively new University Institutes of Technology (IUTs) are particularly significant for adult learning. Oriented toward adult needs, they offer adults the chance to improve disciplinary knowledge and to prepare for the University Diploma of Technology. Many IUT diplomas and courses have been adapted for adults who have work experience, but may lack the traditional secondary-leaving credential (the "baccalaureat").

National, regional, or local branches of employers' organizations have set up numerous centers for initial and further training. They also have established nonprofit training associations (ASFOs) to help firms implement training policies and programs. Employers' organizations and trade unions, on a regional or occupational principle, have formed Training Assurance Funds (FAF) for wage-earners and for nonwage earners as a means of collecting and administering training monies.

A great many local or regional organizations sponsor informal "popular" or "cultural" learning activities. This form of adult learning is increasingly referred to as "socio-culturelle animation;" its practitioners are called "animateurs." While eligible to receive resources from firms under the 1971 Law, or special state subventions, programs of "animation" are financed usually by private community groups or local or regional government. Municipalities, depending upon the social and educational conscience of the political party in power, may offer classes, films, or discussion groups in various community centers.

The multi-purpose Universites du Troisieme Age (Third Age), of which there are now 30 in France, represent an important innovation for learning among older people. In concept, the Third Age universities are intended to help older people achieve such goals as personal growth, autonomy and self-worth, and to counteract passivity and physical deterioration. Classes are based on student needs and interests. Arts and crafts programs, reading groups, and guided tours are also typically available, and activities related to physical health are given special emphasis.

No single "Troisieme Age" structure has been adopted. Some are linked to university departments or institutes; others were established by separate "associations" (in Grenoble, the "Interage University," as it is called, was developed by an association of retired people). Teachers and staff are mostly volunteers, many, themselves, "retired."

Some Lessons from Foreign Practices

A major task set for the project was to draw implications for education and training in the U.S., on the basis of policies and programs judged to be effective in the nine countries studied. What lessons about the provision of adult education, in short, can the U.S. learn from the experiences of these nations?

The responsible comparative analyst, perhaps needless to say, must acknowledge geographic and economic differences as well as differing cultural and educational traditions, despite the fact that the nine countries selected for the study are all "industrialized." The respon-

sible policy analyst must recognize the problematic political-and-fiscal feasibility of any major new program becoming law in the U.S.

These things said, we may note first that, on comparative balance, the adult education situation in the U.S.--judged by gross level of participation--seems quite good. The estimated total participation rate across all organized and sustained adult education programs for the U.S.--27 percent--was third highest of the nine nations, behind the Soviet Union and Sweden.

There is not space to elaborate all the implications for government policy that were identified by the six-person study team (some 30 were set forth in the report from the project). The half-dozen to be commented on reflect the present author's judgments about what is most needed to better serve adult learners in the U.S.

- Having learned something about employee training systems in other countries, it is clear that the U.S. badly needs a new and improved manpower or human resources development policy. The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) is not comprehensive; its programs are heavily directed to the marginally employable and the young. Currently the National Commission on Employment Policy, as well as other groups, are deliberating new policies. What kinds of new initiatives should they be considering?

First, putting it bluntly, and mindful of its problematic feasibility: all employees in the U.S. should have the opportunity for paid educational leave (PEL) in some amount and with some degree of frequency. PEL plans are widely in effect in Europe. PEL was recently (1979) advocated for Canada by the prestigious Adams Commission of Inquiry on Educational leave

and Productivity. The International Labor Organization (of which the U.S. is once again a member), after eight years of study, endorsed in 1975 the principle of paid educational leave as national policy.

Another needed new component in a national training system for the U.S. is a mechanism which enables individual adults up to age 55 or so to obtain subsidized training for entirely new careers, and which also serves to meet immediate (temporary or regional) labor market shortages. Britain's TOPS uses government operated skillcentres as well as selected colleges. Sweden's National Labor Market Board relies primarily on local schools which are heavily subsidized to provide "rapid action" training programs.

Other training innovations are suggested by foreign practices. Educational opportunities for government workers could be improved: West Germany has a civil service paid educational leave arrangement; Denmark has a residential College of Municipal Administrators. For parents of small children to engage in job training, childcare services are typically needed; virtually all industrialized nations--with the U.S. a notable exception--have national childcare systems.

- A second lesson that the U.S. can learn from foreign experiences concerns learning services for poorly educated and illiterate adults. Current services for these groups are thin and badly fragmented. The federal Adult Basic Education program reaches only a fraction of its target population of school dropouts. Adult illiterates--native born as well as non-English speaking immigrants and refugees--are served mainly by two voluntary literacy organizations: the National Alliance for Literacy Advance and the Literacy Volunteers of America.

Some of the best work is represented by Sweden's "bridging education," which is carried out in Municipal Adult Schools and in 100 percent-subsidized "bridging" study circles, with students often recruited through the Swedish Board of Education's "out-reaching" efforts at work places and housing areas. In Canada, there are several seemingly effective basic skills programs that are operated in conjunction with its national manpower training system, as well as the unique Frontier College operating in Western Canada.

Many community organizations are potential sponsors of literacy training. Churches are a prime candidate (in West Germany they receive subsidies for general education work). The voluntary literacy organizations should have government funding. The experience of the British adult literacy campaign--indeed the experience of numerous national literacy campaigns in undeveloped as well as developed countries--should be considered toward the possibility of large-scale, coordinated efforts in this country.

In addition to these two major areas for new policies and expanded services, four other implications or lessons are worth briefly noting.

- A new type of institution for serving older people--one that provides a number of needed services in one location--should be experimented with in the U.S. Continuous learning as a key to continued mental and physical vitality should be the core concept. The Universites du Troisieme Age in France are be an excellent model.

- Televised courses on aspects of parenting have proved successful in Canada and the United Kingdom. Conceivably this is because many parents prefer not to discuss their parenting problems in public (in classes), but

find televised courses highly useful. They should be developed and piloted in this country.

- Adults have diverse learning interests. In most communities in the U.S. (and abroad) there are diverse organizations that do or can provide educational services. Arguably communities need a cooperative body that can plan and coordinate this comprehensive provision. (I have made this argument elsewhere.*) The Local Further Education Councils throughout the Province of Alberta could provide one model.

- Finally, and this will strike most readers as singularly utopian (that is, "unfeasible"), U.S. educational leaders should begin giving thought to the idea of a unified lifelong learning system to replace the sadly fragmented and politically riven "nonsystem" that now exists in the U.S.

The idea would involve drawing on all manner of educational resources--school and non-school--to meet the broad learning needs and interests of all individuals as they grow from childhood to old age. The system would exist to facilitate continuous learning. Conceivably it could facilitate the integration of education and work--or even education, vocation and avocation--throughout the lifespan. Concepts of this kind are being actively considered by government in Sweden and the Province of British Columbia. Reportedly there is something approximating a unified lifelong educational system in present-day Spain. Given the current dismay

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* Peterson, R. E., and Associates. Lifelong Learning in America: An Overview of Current Practices, Available Resources, and Future Prospects. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979.

about public education in America, now may be a good time to try to think about education and learning in a wholly different way: in brief, by considering learning needs and interests of the total population, and how they can most effectively be met.